OBN NEWS

April 1991

OBN News, 519 Church Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2C9 Tel: (416)-649-1356 / Fax: (416)-649-1314

The Ontario Bisexual Network (OBN) is a group formed to enable contacts among bisexual people in Ontario, and to help them undertake activities of interest. At present, these activities include: a mailing list, a newsletter, support group meetings, social activities, a political action group, education of others, information sharing, and safe sexuality information. The network's only mandate is to bring people together. — OBN Meeting, August 2, 1990.

WOMEN AND *AIDS*

An Editorial

The whole issue of AIDS has been a difficult one for this group to tackle, and we have been slow to focus on it.

Because of our knowledge of the 'bi' scene, we may be in a unique position to help prevent infection of women. Consider for example, the case of a bisexual man who is married and who fears that if he "comes out" to his wife, she would threaten to break up the marriage. Because the husband is in the closet, such a couple may never have discussed the need for "safe sex" within the marriage.

There are many questions that need answering. Because of the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases, including the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), surely each partner deserves clear answers from the other about the nature of their sexual contacts, past and present?

Even if men in these situations practice what they consider "safe sex" outside the marriage, is it not a woman's right to decide for herself the standards of safety she wants to live by?

Would it save lives if we alerted women everywhere to the fact that many men do have sexual contacts outside marriage (both heterosexual and homosexual) and therefore risk carrying sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, to their partners (and to any subsequent children)?

Do women have a right to know their male partner's sexual orientation, or is this strictly a private matter? Is this level of privacy a human right?

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March 21st Meeting Focussed on Children

There was a lively discussion at OBN's March 21st meeting about children and bisexuality. What should children be taught about bisexuality? What do you think people should have told you when you were young? Would your life have been different? The group entertained many difficult issues during the course of the evening.

It is worth noting that the Toronto Board of Education has initiated a *Human Sexuality Program* and *Services to Lesbians and Gays* in Toronto schools. For those who would like to follow up on this issue and find out what children *are* being taught about bisexuality, the person to get in touch with is Tony Gambini, Student Support Services, Toronto Board of Education, 155 College Street, Toronto M5T 1P6, Tel: (416)-591-8153.

New "Pass-The Hat" Method Bringing New Life to the OBN Treasury

To keep the treasury viable, we have begun a "pass-the-hat" policy for all regular OBN meetings. Members will be expected to toss in $2 each to cover miscellaneous expenses including the cost of newsletters supplied at meetings.

If you're having trouble with cash, pick a contribution in the $0-2 range and catch up later when you're flush. (Your presence is the most important thing.)

We are also still seeking a volunteer Treasurer to keep the money and be responsible for passing the hat at meetings. Not much work is involved.

Your Chance to Facilitate

Everyone gets a chance, if they wish, to facilitate an OBN meeting, either on a one-shot basis or by committing to take charge at regular intervals. We do need help, and everyone benefits from having a variety of styles and viewpoints. Speak up at the next meeting.

PRIDE DAY Coming Soon

It's never too soon to set aside Pride Day on your calendar and to volunteer to help either on the OBN table or with the whole event, including the parade. This year we have a large rainbow flag to wave in addition to the OBN banner.

OBN Meeting Times

OBN Meetings are held on the first Thursday of every month, from 6 to 8 p.m., and on the third Thursday of every month from 8 to 10 p.m., at the 519 Community Center (519 Church Street, just north of Wellesley). To add your name to our mailing list write to OBN at the address above.

Who to Contact

The following is a list of OBN members who have volunteered their time to talk with you about questions you may have, or if you just need someone for emotional support:

Bill Jeffery 922-4262
Bruce Small 649-1356
Carol Broderick 766-7011
Catherine Crockett 537-5832
Les Green 968-6955
Rob Cusson 362-9892
Scott Lucas 633-5666

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Women and *AIDS* (cont. from p. 1)

Would widespread publicity of the real incidence of bisexuality among men, or of the incidence of homosexual contacts by men who consider themselves heterosexual, cause suffering for the men by forcing some of them out of the closet against their will?

Can OBN play a part in assisting women who feel uncomfortable when they find out that their male partner is gay or bisexual? Those who are interested in tackling these issues are invited to join our *Safe Sexuality* subgroup. Contact Bruce at the next OBN meeting.

Articles Still Needed for Next Newsletter

Contributions to the newsletter are urgently required for the May issue, since the editor will be away the first week of May. Bring your articles to the mid-month meeting, or to the OBN mail slot at main desk of the 519 Community Centre on Church St. north of Wellesley in advance of that meeting. Or fax it to 649-1314. If there are not sufficient articles the May issue will be skipped.

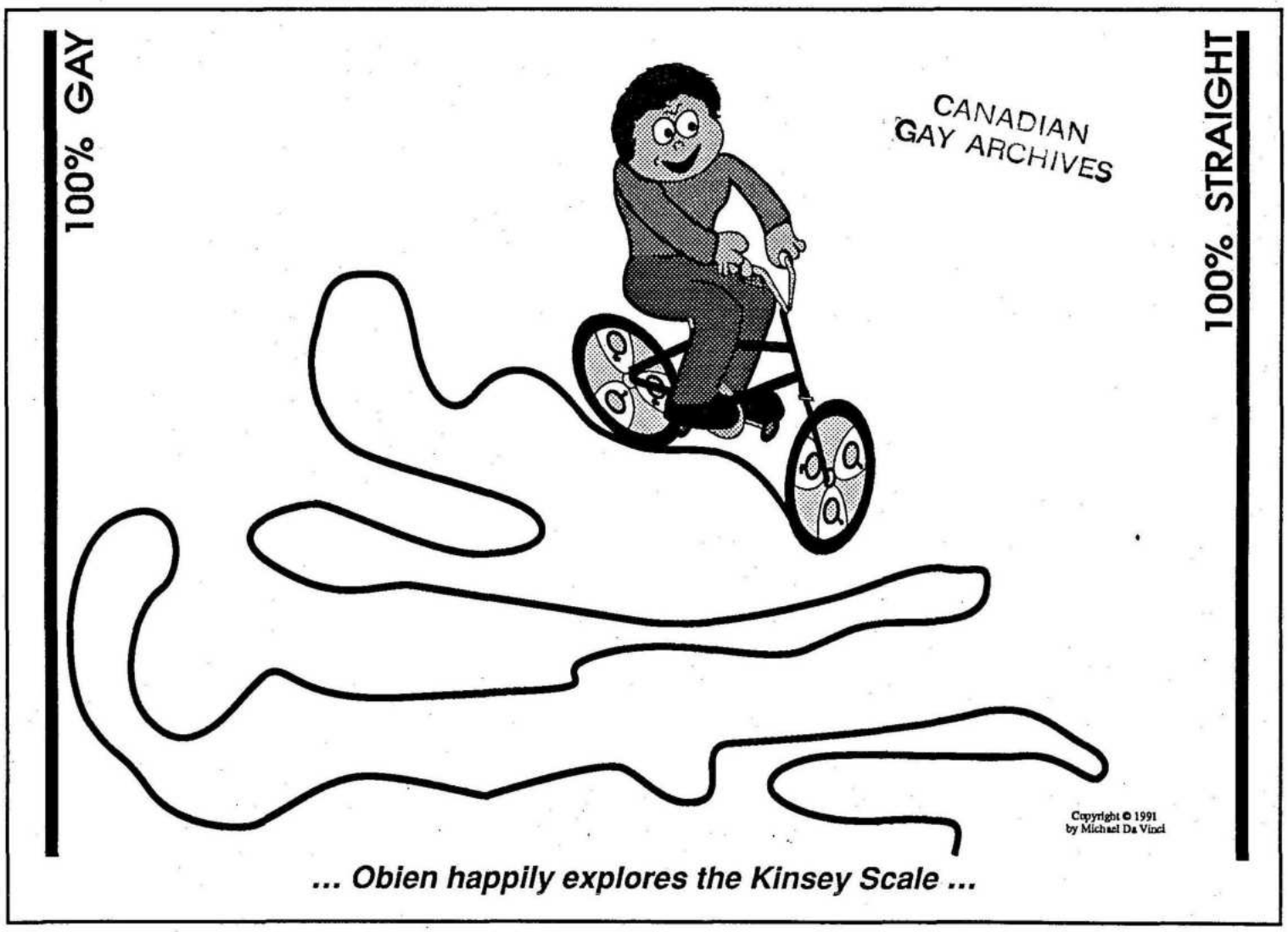
Women and *Safer Sex*

(from an interview with Isabelle Sourdif, an Adult AIDS Education Coordinator at the Federal Centre for AIDS, excerpted from Health Promotion, Vol. 29, No. 1, Summer 1990)

When it comes to sexuality, one of the fundamental differences between women and men relates to the issue of power. Not only have men traditionally been the ones to "wear the pants", they also wear the condoms. Safer sex often means that women have to negotiate sexual behaviour, convince men that they should use condoms, and even buy condoms themselves. But many women simply don't have the power to do these things; they call for a kind of assertive behaviour that has often not been encouraged, or even allowed.

Women also tend to view sex differently from men. Many women don't necessarily consider penetration the "main attraction" — they enjoy other forms of sexual contact as well. but the most prevalent message on safer sex is "use condoms", which assumes that sex means penetration. So we need to suggest alternatives to coitus, but at the same time to realize that these alternatives may not be well received by male partners, or, for that matter, by some women.

We have to provide more than just instructions on condom use. We have to assist women in acquiring the skills needed to assert themselves, negotiate and change sexual behaviour; we have to encourage self-esteem and such things as a positive body image. It's time to provide the information targeted specifically at women. And since safer sex is a joint responsibility, we need to target heterosexual men as well.



... Obien happily explores the Kinsey Scale ...